

the Bay Area staying with friends ever since. "For a pretty long time now we've been doing things separately," Weed acknowledged. "There are tremendous tensions in the house."

Not the least of them has been Weed's increasing willingness to speak out independently on the case. The Hearsts—who call him "Toothbrush" behind his back for his unruly mustache—did not invite Weed down to Las Cruces with them. While they were there, he flew off alone to Mexico City, where he persuaded Regis Debray, the former commander-in-arms of the late Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara, to write an open letter to Patricia urging her to demonstrate that her conversion to the cause of revolution was genuine. The SLA ignored the letter; said Weed glumly, "It's beginning to look like nothing we do is going to work. I can't think of any way the SLA will let Patty go."

The stalemate could explode into violent tragedy at any moment—a resolution nobody wanted. But until Patty Hearst's long saga was over, the enigma of her conversion to terrorism would remain. The brave words were that she couldn't possibly have done it; the dark fear was precisely that she could.

The Zebra Killers

Having the Symbionese Liberation Army in residence might seem enough bad fortune for any city, but it is barely the beginning of San Francisco's troubles. While the SLA was shooting up bystanders in a bank robbery last week, other killers were perpetrating a set of crimes that sounded like a city dweller's nightmare come true: a stranger approaches and, often without a word, shoots down his victim and calmly walks away. There were three such shootings last week. The victims were white, witnesses said the gunmen were black, and police theorized that the seemingly motiveless shootings were the work of a small group of men (called the "Zebra killers" by police and press) who have now killed twelve whites and wounded six since November.

The shootings and their aftermath bitterly upset a city that considers itself America's most civilized. Whites were fearful, streets were deserted in the evening hours when most of the shootings have taken place, and police advised people not to walk the streets except in groups. On orders from Mayor Joseph Alioto, police launched an all-out search through the black community—stopping, questioning and sometimes searching hundreds of black men who resembled a vague description of one of the killers. There was a long-odds chance that the search might turn up the gun-

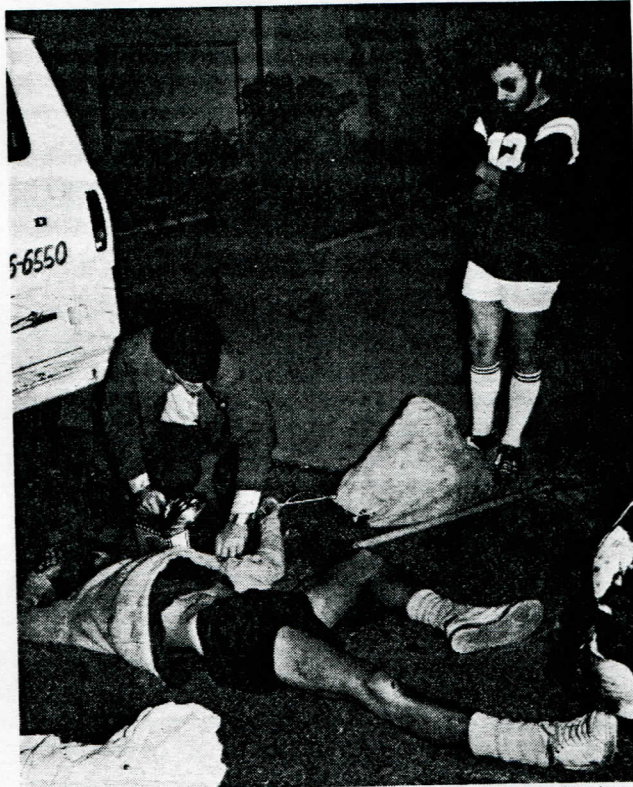
man, but it was a certainty that the tactic would infuriate at least part of the black community.

Last week there were three shootings, and one victim died: Nelson T. Shields IV, would-be news photographer and son of a Du Pont Co. executive, was helping a friend with an errand. The friend, Jonathan May, had to pick up a rug at a house on a quiet residential street. May went into the house and Shields was outside, clearing a space in their station wagon when someone shot him three times in the back. Shields died almost instantly; a witness said she saw a black man running from the scene.

Earlier in the week, Terry White, 15, and Ward Alexander, 18, were standing at a bus stop in a black neighborhood when they were shot; both survived, but though a policeman said there were ten cars in the neighborhood looking for the

tion that might fit thousands of black San Franciscans. Capt. Charles Barca, who is heading the Zebra investigation, admitted that if the dragnet turned up the Zebra killer with his gun, the legally dubious search might make the gun inadmissible in court. On the other hand, Barca told NEWSWEEK's Gerald C. Lubnow, "knowing we have the guy could lead to a lot of other things. We could search his home, for instance."

Racist: Mayor Alioto and Washington Garner, the black head of the City Police Commission, urged blacks to cooperate with the search. "Extraordinary situations call for extraordinary measures," Alioto explained. But blacks and civil libertarians protested bitterly. "This is a racist outrage," said Paul Halvonik, an



Coroner examining Shields's body (above); vague descriptions yield composite sketch of a murderer



Murder victim Shields



Zebra killer, their assailant got away. Detectives guessed that the crimes were all the work of a very small group of men—at least two, but no more than four. At least three different guns have been used in the shootings.

From descriptions provided by witnesses, police drew up a composite sketch of one of the killers. With that sketch and a brief description as their guide, police set to work stopping hundreds of black motorists and pedestrians, checking their identifications and sometimes searching them. Police conceded they were on questionable ground in stopping people based on a descrip-

American Civil Liberties Union official. The Rev. Cecil Williams, a black minister, charged that police had stopped some men as many as six times; police responded by issuing 1,600 2- by 4-inch "Zebra cards" that blacks could produce in order to show they had already been searched.

And the search went on. In one movie theater, the ACLU charged, a squad of police walked in and prowled the aisle shining flashlights on the audience. They flushed out half a dozen blacks, lined them up in the lobby, searched them—and walked out.

*Police said the name had no racial connotations; it was coined because messages about the killings are being broadcast on a citywide police radio channel called the "Z-band." Since it's hard to understand single letters over the police radio, officers use their phonetic-alphabet counterparts, and Zebra is the phonetic alphabet term for Z.